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Ethical and methodological responses to risks in fieldwork with deaf Ugandans

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ABSTRACT

While members of marginalised communities may be motivated to participate in ethnographic research by the desire to have their stories ‘heard’/seen, find a place in history and transmit their legacy, telling and publishing these stories may also put them and the researchers at risk. This paper discusses the ethical and methodological dilemmas inherent in studies on the Ugandan deaf community’s emancipation and sustainability. A first risk factor resides in the country’s political situation, strategy planning, financial management and pressures on democracy and human rights. Other risk factors are power hierarchies and questionable ideologies on the status of Ugandan Sign Language (UgSL) (factor 2) and the sometimes-scant attention to ethics in development partnerships (factor 3). These risks directly and indirectly enter the research space, for example, when participants warn that their own and the researcher’s safety could be compromised if certain information is divulged, resulting in social isolation, loss of income, and even threats to life and limb. Information sharing, transparency in partnerships, and attention to the status of UgSL are

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